

REPORT OF RESEARCH RESULTS

Title: Resiliency in Caregiving: Older Spouses' Experience in Singapore

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Summary (outline and conclusions of research)

While there is a substantial amount of literature on family members as caregivers, not much has been done to explore the experiences of spousal caregivers. These caregivers face greater challenges as compared to for example, a child who cares for their parent as they have to live with their spouse and have little choice in becoming a caregiver. These challenges are exacerbated by their own age and associated morbidities. As such, resiliency is a key concept when it comes to caring for a loved one.

In Singapore, the fertility rate is decreasing while the life expectancy is increasing, suggesting that there will be more spouses who find themselves in the caregiving role.

As such, this study aimed to explore the experience of caregiving among older spouse caregivers in Singapore and the factors that motivates them to continue doing so, that is to say, the factors associated with resilience.

Doing so can highlight the areas healthcare providers should look into and areas where other family members or the community could intervene to aid the spousal caregiver.

Currently, the study has helped to identify the challenges older spouses face and their perception on caregiving. With further analyses, this study could add to the current literature on what could be done for older spouse caregivers and awareness can be brought to couples so that they can prepare themselves if and when there is a need for them to take on the role.

Aim of Research:

1. To explore the experience and effect of caregiving of older spousal caregivers in Singapore
2. To ascertain factors associated with resilience among older spouse caregiver when caring for their frail partner

Method of Research & Progression

75 couples above the age of 50 and living together, where the spouse (caregiver) is caring for their partner (care-recipient) for atleast 6 months were recruited in the study.

A mixed-method explanatory design collecting both quantitative and qualitative information was used.

The quantitative component gathered information on demographics, medical conditions, frailty and quality of life from both caregiver and care-recipient. Additionally care-recipients were

assessed on the Katz Index of Independence in Activities of Daily Living and the Montreal Cognitive Assessment whereas the caregiver completed the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SLS), the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), the Relationship Satisfaction Scale (RSS), and the Caregiver Reaction Assessment (CRA).

The qualitative component involved a one-one interview with the caregiver to identify what resilience means to them and how they persevered in a demanding role.

The data collection process has been completed. Data analysis is undergoing for the quantitative portion while data analysis for the qualitative portion has been completed.

Results of Research

Quantitative Component: Caregivers were mostly female ($n=60$, 80%) and Chinese ($n=55$, 73.3%). Care-recipients ($mean=71.7$ years) were older than caregivers ($mean=68.9$ years). Couples were married for a mean of 43.3 years. A higher proportion of care-recipients were categorised as 'frail' ($n=65$, 86.7%) on the Fried's Frailty Index as compared to caregivers ($n=27$, 36%). Preliminary results indicate RSS to have the strongest association with caregiver esteem (measured through the CRA), $r = 0.438$, $p < 0.001$. This was followed by SLS, $r = 0.362$, $p = 0.001$. Lower levels of CE were associated with increase in age ($r = -0.255$, $p = 0.027$), increase in disturbed sleep schedule and poor health ($r = -0.275$, $p = 0.017$), lack of finances ($r = -0.260$, $p = 0.024$) and higher scores on the PSS ($r = -0.282$, $p = 0.014$).

Qualitative Component: Thematic analysis identified six themes on the important aspects of caregiving: activities of daily living, dietary management, providing medical attention and comfort, attending to psychosocial/emotional needs, ensuring safety and engage in exercise and physical activity. In seeking to understand the perception of caregiving from the caregivers, four themes were identified: spousal duties, motivation, attitude and the reality of caregiving.

Future Areas to Take Note of, and Going Forward

Most caregivers in this study were women and thus, the perceptions and results reported here are primarily that of women. Future studies could look at male caregivers and explore potential differences and similarities to the findings from the current study. Participants from this study were also from one specific centre, with access to the same resources and facilities. This suggests that caregivers from other centres and institutions might have different experiences. This is another area future studies could examine.

Means of Official Announcement of Research Results

Currently, the research team is trying to publish a paper on the qualitative component in an international journal. The research team is also writing up the quantitative component and is on the lookout for potential journals.

Abstracts have been submitted to the upcoming Annual Scientific Meeting for potential oral and/or poster presentations.